

Action-Packed



IGA Three-Day Conference Filled with Opportunities for Attendees to Share and Learn

by Penny Stacey

Often, conferences include downtime—or a seminar here or there that can be missed. You know the drill—the same information, same place, same speaker. But this year's Independent Glass Association's (IGA) conference was not one of those.

"I didn't sit through any that I didn't take something away from," said Larry Hamilton of Hamilton Glass, who traveled from Newton, Iowa, to attend the event. The conference was held May 1-3 in Las Vegas at the Cashman Convention Center, where it was co-located with the Americas' Glass Showcase.

A presentation by Tom Feeney of Belron US provided some of the most memorable—and tense—moments of the entire conference.

The action-packed event kicked off with a presentation by IGA president Dave Zoldowski of Auto One in Brighton, Mich., who introduced some of the newest services available to members, including the new "Don't Get Steered" comic book, available to members only (*see box on right for more information*).

He also talked about the growth of the association's certification program since it was launched on January 1.

"It's very user-friendly and we're excited about it," said Zoldowski.

The IGA currently is re-designing its website as well. "By the end of the year, IGA will have one of the most ad-

vanced websites for any of the associations," he said.

One of the additions to the website will be a review of historical pricing data. "For the first time, we're going to be able to furnish you with what that rebalancing or latest *Offer and Acceptance* program means," Zoldowski told attendees.

Chuck Lloyd of Minneapolis-based Livgard & Rabuse also shared with members some of the new services he'll be offering them—including discounted rates for his services.

In the long term, he also hopes to create a network of attorneys who understand the glass business to be available to IGA members.

Attendees of the IGA conference came away not only with a new comic book—but also with tons of information.



IGA Launches Comic Book: "Don't Get Steered"



During last year's Independent Glass Association's (IGA) annual conference, consumer advocate Ralph Nader advised attendees during his keynote speech that a good way to gain recognition from legislators is to present a topic of concern in a form they could understand easily, such as a comic book. During this year's annual conference, the IGA made that advice a reality, as it launched its own comic book, "Don't Get Steered"—an illustrated depiction of what steering is and how it can affect independent shop owners.

"[The comic book's] purpose is to educate consumers, lawmakers and others about the issues they face everyday trying to compete in a market that is controlled by competitor-administrators," says IGA director of operations Patrick Smith.

The comic book was distributed to IGA members during the conference—and via mail to those not in attendance. In turn, they hope to distribute the comic book further to consumers, attorneys, lawmakers, insurance agents and judges, Smith says.

Smith says members are hoping the comic book will allow them to make a positive difference in their communities.

"The membership is very excited," he says. "They feel this simple comic book will allow them to finally demonstrate what they fight against everyday."

"There is against us an army of opposition," Lloyd said. "It's time to have our own army."

NAGS on the Spot

Bud Oliver and James Patterson of National Auto Glass Specifications International (NAGS) also took center stage during the conference to answer attendees' burning questions about NAGS

and how it works.

One common question was: how does NAGS create the numbers in its catalogs?

Oliver explained that the numbers are generated by much research,

Attorney Erica Eversman spoke about automotive legal issues.

much of which comes from shops who share their retail acquisition costs for glass.

"We're constantly adjusting information," Oliver said. "Anyone who wants to send their cost data is welcome to do that."

And, what if NAGS didn't exist?

"If there was no NAGS benchmark, carriers would have to figure out a way to determine the pricing," Patterson said.

Most sessions provided a question-and-answer period with the speaker.



Faced with many questions about discounting from insurance carriers, Patterson noted that when NAGS develops its benchmarks, a profit margin is included.

"We don't take that profit margin away," Patterson said. "The market does."

A New Term

Automotive repair lobbyist Bob Smith of Storm Appraisal and Management Services Inc. traveled from the Midwest to speak to the group of independents in attendance. And, he introduced them to a new term: deceptive referrals.

"Steering is actually a deceptive referral," he said.

"I do not like to use [the word 'steering'] because when you talk to legislators and you say the word steering, a gray cloud drops over their eyes," he added.

Smith, a former member of the collision repair industry, recently helped to introduce two different anti-steering bills—one in Kansas and one in Missouri.

In addition to introducing this new term, Smith gave attendees tips on getting the attention of legislators.

"We use a very smooth country-folks

approach with them," he said. "If I see [a legislator] walking down the hallway, I say, 'Do you have a minute Senator?'"

He also mentioned that describing proposed legislation to legislators as beneficial to consumers is a good way to get their attention.

"They get reelected by constituents so any bill with a consumer spin has a whole lot more chance of going somewhere," said Smith, whose presentation was entitled "Cowboys and Steering."

However, Smith warned that even when legislation is passed it's not always an overnight fix. "There are no light-switch answers," he said.

"Why Do Insurers Care?"

As he took the stage to provide anti-steering tips, Corey Hemperly of Windshield Doctor in Pocatello, Idaho, asked, "Maybe consumers don't care where they go—they just want their cars fixed. Does anyone remember who said this?" Hemperly was quoting Sen. Don Benton, who asked this very question at a hearing recently in Washington State (see related story on page 28).

"Had I been there, my question to that Senator would have been, 'why is it that insurers care where people go?'"

Hemperly said. "Why are you bringing out all the guns to fight this type thing?"

Hemperly served on a panel formed to discuss this topic; the panel also included IGA board members Bryan Yarborough of Glass Doctor of Tampa, Rick Rosar of Rapid Glass and Shawn Newport of Star Auto Glass.

"We're all in this to make money and it has to be done fairly and on a level playing field," Hemperly continued. Hemperly also provided several tips for providing with potential steering practices:

- Take 15 minutes a week to read through state statutes and insurance statutes;
- Review consumer protection laws;
- Stay involved in trade organizations. "One of the biggest arguments I hear is 'I don't have time to go [to conferences]," Hemperly said. "We closed our shop for a day because we know it's vital to be here. We'd lose more by not being here than by being here;"
- Develop personal relationships with customers. "We view each and every one of our customers as a relationship," he said;
- Provide customer loyalty programs. "We reward the customer who has been there for a long time," he said; and
- Stay focused. Hemperly compared

At left, Shat-R-Proof's Dave Osland shows the company's latest to IGA Board member Rick Rosar, Below, Crystal Glass introduced a new removal tool.





During the session, attendees shared tips for making their businesses a success with each other.

the industry to a blizzard he and his father, Nathan, also of Windshield Doctor, encountered on their drive to Las Vegas. “We kept going. We stayed focused on where we were and where we were going—and that’s just a reminder to all of us,” he said.

Rosar, Newport and Yarborough described the comic book the IGA recently released entitled “Don’t Get Steered” and how shops can use it to work with legislators, insurance agents and customers in explaining this practice and how to avoid it.

An ‘Unfriendly’ Audience

The most memorable moment of the conference came on Friday morning. Tom Feeney, then executive vice president of Belron US (*see related story on page 32*), spent more than an hour during the conference attempting to dispel many misconceptions he feels independent shop owners have about Safelite Solutions, the third-party administrator branch of the company.

“I thought hard about why I was coming to an audience called ‘unfriendly,’” he said. “In the end, I believe all our constituents will be served better by working together on things about which we do agree.”

After giving a bit of history on how Safelite came to develop its own network—in response to a need for shops in locations where there previously weren’t any—he took on what he said were the myths surrounding the company.

Among these was one issue he called “the elephant in the room”—steering.

“You give us way too much credit,” he said. “We’re not as good as you think we are. Why would we risk a major multi-million contract to give an extra replacement to one of our auto glass shops? We’d never risk our business by doing something illegal.”

He added, “We are a very competitive organization, but you are not my competition.”

Feeney also reminded audience members who Safelite Solutions’ customers are.

“We take very seriously that those calls are not [from] our customers—they’re the insurance companies’ customers,” he said.

And pricing? “When you get the price from Safelite Solutions, I assure you it’s the same price insurers give us,” he said.

Feeney also talked about timing on pricing, saying that his company pays shops in 12 days or less from the time the invoice is received, and that the money is released from Safelite within one day of its receiving payment from the insurance companies. In instances when this doesn’t happen, Feeney said it’s likely either an invoice wasn’t received quickly at Safelite, or there was something wrong with the invoice. He encouraged attendees who had examples of late payments to contact the company to figure out what the issue might be.

“If you haven’t been paid, there’s something wrong with the invoices,” said Feeney.

Later in the presentation, when asked about this again, he added, “Many shops are not fast billers—but that’s your business, not ours.”

He also spoke to concerns that shops’ proprietary information is distributed throughout the company’s other divisions, including its retail portion.

“Information we get from you is not disclosed to Safelite Auto Glass field management,” Feeney said.

And how does the company feel about anti-steering legislation?

“We support anti-steering legislation,” he said. “We do not support the gag order where we cannot tell consumers about their policyholder rights or legislation that says you cannot answer phones (i.e., administer claims) and install glass.”

Many in the audience also commented that they had jobs “stolen” by Safelite—for example, a technician showing up to do a job and finding that a Safelite technician was in the process of completing the job already.

“We do not steal jobs,” he said. “Safelite field management complains about this too. They think we steal jobs from them too.”

“I thought that might give you a little tug at the heart,” Feeney chuckled.

He stressed openness throughout the presentation.

“Anytime you’re in Columbus, Ohio, the hot spot of America, we’d be

happy to host you in our offices," Feeney offered.

GlasWeld president Mike Boyle asked Feeney if all the myths are untrue, why he believes Safelite has the reputation among independents that it does.

"The fact that we have shops that replace auto glass and that we answer the phones," he replied.

Feeney took questions from numerous audience members, including Donna Braden of Jack's Glass, who advised she's encountered not only steering efforts, but also "hostility" from Safelite Solutions' customer service representatives when assisting customers with setting up glass claims.

Feeney encouraged Braden to provide information on the particular calls to him so that he might pull the tapes of the calls and can look into the circumstances surrounding the calls.

"Hostility and rudeness—there's no place for it," he said, adding that to pull a call, he'd need information such as the date of loss, reference number and/or the customer's name.

Another audience member commented on Feeney's observation that Safelite doesn't "steal work" from independents—noting that he's shown up for jobs before and found Safelite techs there.

"We're as curious about those instances as you are," Feeney responded.

Another wondered why glass shops must provided their "proprietary information," such as how much they pay for glass, to Safelite Solutions when it processes claims in which the shop is involved.

"It depends on the requirements of the insurance companies," Feeney advised, "but that information doesn't go any further than that."

During the lengthy question-and-answer portion of Feeney's presentation, one curious audience member asked for his position on AGRSS registration.

"You will not see us be registered, as we do not support third-party audits," he said to audible gasps in the room.

Since the conference, Belron US spokesperson Jenny Cain has advised AGRSS magazine that company officials believe that its own training and certification program, "SafeTech," takes the [AGRSS] Standard as adopted to a higher level."

"We think it is important to note that Safelite supports the efforts of AGRSS to establish industry standards," Cain said. "After assessing the AGRSS Standard as it is today, we believe that our own training and certification program, SafeTech, takes the standard adopted by AGRSS to a higher level. We do not feel the AGRSS Standard goes far enough because it doesn't, for example, require back-

ground checks and drug testing of technicians."

Despite the resulting controversy of Feeney's presentation, those in attendance seemed to appreciate his attendance at the conference, despite their many questions and concerns.

"I give [Safelite] a lot of credit to show that they're extending the olive branch, as they know there's a lot of negativity out there toward their corporation," said Russo.

Russo added, "I also credit [Feeney] with taking questions that were not pre-selected or pre-screened."

AGRSS: The Next Step

Shortly after Feeney's presentation, during which AGRSS registration became a hot topic, Carl Tompkins, chair of the AGRSS accreditation committee, and Cindy Ketcherside, chair of the AGRSS Council, took the same stage to discuss the third-party validation system and the reasons for registration.

"[Third-party validation] is going to provide worth not only to our industry, but also to the consumer," Ketcherside said. "It really is validation."

Tompkins asked the audience, "Are you AGRSS-registered? There's no good reason not to be."

IGA members who attended the session received coupons, and had 30 days after the conference to register

The IGA board introduced several new services during the conference, including the comic book, "Don't Get Steered!!!"



with AGRSS free of charge, as IGA volunteered to pay their registration fees during that period.

Trade Show Time

While many attended seminars and informational sessions, the Spring Auto Glass Expo™ saw several new brand-new product and tool launches.

One popular item was AEGIS Tools International's brand-new SOLO™ II Windshield Setting Tool. The updated tool features a reversible arm to allow technicians to work from either the passenger or driver side of the vehicle. The arm also extends to accommodate extreme windshield rake angles, wing windows, heavy-duty and loop arm mirrors and larger truck windshields. New pivoting cup brackets allow work on virtually any curvature also, according to the company.

"We haven't come across any windshield we can't use it on," says AEGIS president Bob Birkhauser, who also mentioned it's designed to be ergonomically safe for the operator's back, neck and shoulders.

Crystal Glass also launched a new tool—the "HammerHead." The tool is designed to separate the lower corners of windshields that cannot be cut with a cold knife. It utilizes standard Extractor blades and is easily adjustable in length, so it fits right inside the installer's toolbox.

Doug Young, marketing manager for windshields.com, which was launched by TCG International in December 2007, also was on-hand to share the latest updates to the system.

The company has changed the fee structure for the site; now, shops can get local vendor positions for free—and they only pay for referral leads. Likewise, shops have the option of declining a lead if they choose to do so, and are only charged for leads they take.

"It gives them the ability to say, 'yes, I will take it,' or 'no, I can't,'" Young said.

Young adds that he has been focusing on improving the site's search engine optimization.

"We're starting to see results," he said, referring to the site as the "Orbitz" of auto glass.

As a show special, the company

**"We closed our shop for a day because we know it's vital to be here. We'd lose more by not being here than by being here."
—Corey Hemperly, Windshield Doctor**

waived IGA members' \$99 subscription fee for the next six months.

Sister company SRP shared a booth with windshields.com, in which it displayed both the BTB North America tool line, and its new Origin™ adhesive, which was launched earlier this year.

David Osland, vice president of marketing and product development for SRP, described the adhesive as a standard adhesive at a value price with good safe-drive away times. The adhesive has a safe drive-away time of four hours at 70 degrees Fahrenheit on a vehicle with dual airbags, according to information from SRP.

"We're trying to help the glass shops save money," Osland said. He added that the adhesive is available in a sausage pack (in addition to a cartridge), which also saves the shop money in packaging, with the increasing price of aluminum used to make cartridges.

The sausage pack is not only more affordable than a cartridge, it's also more green, Osland noted.

"While adhesive isn't necessarily a green product, the packaging is a little more green," he said, noting that this also leads to less trash created, smaller dumpsters needed, etc.

"Anywhere a glass shop can save money is helpful," Osland said.

While many launched new products, SIKA Corp. sported a brand-new booth-unveiled for the first time at this show.

GTS Services, whose owner Scott Orth provided one of the most raved-about sessions of the conference, pro-

moted its Internet marketing services during the show.

The company provides organic site optimization to glass shops, along with online market and competitive analysis, web analytics and even website design.

Many commented that the traffic for the show was a bit heavier than those in the auto glass industry of late.

"I thought the floor traffic on Friday was much better than previous shows, not just the IGA shows, but all shows as of late," said NAGS' Bud Oliver. "Saturday's traffic was also decent the first half of the day."

Mainstreet's Mark Haeck agreed. "Traffic to our booth was steady," he said. "We're pleased with the number of qualified prospects and their level of interest in both our software and web site development. I have to admit this show exceeded my expectations."

Happy Attendees

Like those exhibiting, attendees of the conference and trade show walked away pleased they attended.

"[The comic book] was one of the most helpful tools I'll take out of here," said Randy Dietz of Atlas Windshield Repair in Beach, N.D.

He also noted he found particular help in the presentations of Chuck Lloyd of Livgard and Rabuse in Minneapolis, and Erica Eversman, chief counsel for Vehicle Information Services Inc., who spoke on both automotive and legal issues for shops.

The Internet marketing presentation by Scott Orth of GTS Services also was a popular session (*see related story on page 10*).

"I learned a lot on [Internet marketing] in a short period," said Bill Rogers of Alabama Glastek Inc. in Birmingham, Ala.

Overall, he said the conference offered something for all in attendance.

"I think everyone took something from it," Rogers added. ■

Penny Stacey is the editor of AGRR magazine.